

Business Office Streamlines Services to Veterans

by Anita Mareschal

Veterans are now able to enroll, get a Veterans Identification Card (VIC), and be scheduled for an appointment, as well as many other administrative services all in one convenient stop at our Member Services unit of the Business Office. Improving service and access to care is one of our primary goals, and VASDHS is changing how it conducts business to streamline the process for entry into the VA system.

The concept of the Business Office mirrors the look and structure of private health care organizations throughout the nation. Veterans can contact the Business Office for administrative information and services regarding enrollment, eligibility, priority status and billing issues as well as updating demographic and insurance information.

In addition, the office feeds information into our patient and insurance databases, which eventually generates revenue to the medical center. The Business Office includes several key components:

Member Services, the newest addition, is staffed by Enrollment Specialists who are experts in eligibility and veteran entitlement. The Member Services main offices are on the first floor near the Welcome Center, with future plans for staff at the Mission Valley, and North County Clinics.

The Business Office Patient

Representative is a contact point for veterans to ask questions about billing and other matters involving the Business Office.

The **Insurance/Check-In Unit** verifies insurance coverage and checks patients in for their clinic appointments. The check-in process gives the patient the opportunity to meet with

a staff member to update addresses, telephone numbers, next of kin, insurance coverage and other vital information.

The **Billing and Collections Unit** processes claims from patients' health insurance, co-payments, and workers compensation. Their efforts generate approximately \$3 million a year, which is returned to the medical center to provide health care services for our veterans.

The **Utilization Review Nurse** provides clinical information to insurance companies and assists our health care providers in accurate documentation of medical records.

The **Data Capture Coordinator** joined the Business Office earlier this year. She helps providers develop encounter forms to ensure all patient treatment information is captured and transmitted for billing and record documentation.

Another recent addition to the Business Office is the **Medical Record Coding Unit**, which provides medical record coding services for workload and billing purposes.

The Business Office services may be the first exposure

veterans have to VASDHS, so we want to assure a positive experience. We are focusing on superior customer service and excellence in providing veterans with all of their administrative needs in a convenient and friendly setting. Streamlining services to veterans is the goal of the new Business Office and we are excited about this opportunity to cut the red tape and improve customer satisfaction.



New Member Services staff

What is VMRF?

by Sandy Woodruff



l.-r. Sandra Woodruff, Jessica Finney, Steve Oberg, Monica Riggs, Theresa Jackson, Mariam Iqbal, Neal Pike, Melissa Worton, Carol Latham, Eileen Vinnola, Sharoan Smith-Ortega, Kristin Dyer. (Not pictured: Christy Broadwater, Holly Garcia, Fran Pizzo, and Steve Gastelum)

Ever wonder what the Veterans Medical Research Foundation (VMRF) is and what it does? The impact is everywhere. VMRF was formed by Congress about 10 years ago as a nonprofit organization to manage non-VA funded research projects performed in VASDHS space. One of VMRF's goals is to provide infrastructure support directly to the VASDHS. Last year VMRF administered 400 projects, funded over 300 employees, and contributed \$2,042,383 directly to VASDHS for infrastructure support. We look forward to their continued partnership and support to the VASDHS research mission.

W.A.V.E Clinic Volunteers

By Rita Osterman R.N. & Joan Danford O. T.

A group of veterans and staff from the Wellness and Vocational Enrichment (W.A.V.E.) Clinic attended the Volunteer Recognition dinner, sponsored by Old Town State Park, on March 4, 2000. These individuals have been responsible for maintaining the garden at the La Casa de Estudillo in Old Town for over 2 years. Each week they spend 2 hours weeding, raking, watering and sweeping to make the garden a beautiful and peaceful place for everyone to visit.

This volunteer project was established by the W.A.V.E. staff to offer veterans an opportunity to provide community service and as a pre-vocational activity to assist them in developing good work habits. To appreciate their hard work, stop by and enjoy the garden at the La Casa de Estudillo which is located just west of the Casa de Bandini restaurant.

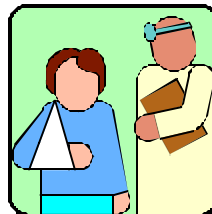
Work Related Injuries/Illness

by Mary Lacy, RN, NP

Are you aware of your responsibilities if you are injured at work, or believe that you have health symptoms related to your work? Following the correct procedure will assure that you get the medical attention you need and that Workers Compensation is notified as soon as possible.

- First, immediately notify your supervisor
- Report to Employee Health on the day of the injury or the first business day after the injury has occurred (off-tours report to Urgent Care only if medical attention is needed).
- Complete Workers Comp Form CA-1 (injury) or CA-2 (illnesses). Obtain these from your supervisor.

When you come to Employee Health you will be given information on your options for treatment either at the VA or privately.



Patients Share their "Caring And Respectful Experiences"

By Marilyn Dennis

Since launching our "We CARE" patient feedback program last July, we've received many positive patient comments regarding the care we provide. Here are just a few examples:

- "Could not get any better care anywhere as I do here. Everyone here is the best."
- "Thank you for working so hard for us vets! And thank you for the smiling faces. It's so nice when people are pleasant to you when you're not feeling well."
- "I am very pleased with VA services. Everyone I have been in contact with has been very helpful and courteous in every way."

SCI Training a Success

by Hilary Tarazi

Over 120 VASDHS physicians have participated in a training session on Spinal Cord Injury, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Kevin O'Connor and many others. Spinal Cord Injury is more common among veterans than other Americans. This training program helps improve the ability of non-SCI specialists to provide excellent care for SCI patients.



New Surgery is Saving Lives

San Diego VA surgeons are now using a FDA recently approved minimally invasive treatment of abdominal aortic aneurysms (AAA). The new devices allow surgery to be performed through small groin incisions rather than a large abdominal incision. "This new treatment enables us to offer surgery to patients who otherwise would not be candidates due to the risks associated with abdominal surgery," said Norman Kumins, M.D., VA vascular surgeon and assistant professor of surgery at the UCSD. "In the past few months, we have treated 13 patients with this technique, 9 of whom would not have been candidates for traditional surgery, and 7 of the 13 patients were over 80 years old. Our patients have less discomfort, shorter stays in the hospital, and have recovered within a few days rather than the usual six to twelve weeks for the current method of treatment."

AAA is an enlargement of the aorta, the main artery of the human body, resulting from a weakening of the vessel wall. If untreated, this enlargement can lead to aortic rupture, which results in death in nearly 80 percent of cases. It is



Erik Owens, M.D. and Norman Kumins, M.D.

believed that 1.5 million people in the United States have AAA, with approximately 200,000 new cases diagnosed every year. Many cases of AAA go undetected, as the disease is usually asymptomatic and often diagnosed by coincidence during tests – such as ultrasounds – for other medical conditions. This disease results in major surgery for approximately 45,000 patients per year. The 15,000 deaths attributed to AAA each year make it the nation's 13th-

leading cause of death.

Surgical team members placing the grafts are Norman Kumins, M.D., Erik Owens, M.D., chief of surgery, VA Medical Center, both assistant professors of surgery at UCSD School of Medicine; and Steve Oglevie, M.D., VA interventional radiologist and associate clinical professor of radiology at UCSD School of Medicine.

Veterans are encouraged to call the VA Medical Center to be screened for abdominal aortic aneurysms at (858) 552-8585 ext. 3251.

Home Food Safety

by Ginger Hughes, RD

The home is one of the most common places for foodborne illness to occur. Over the past five years, in-home cases of food poisoning have increased 25 percent. To keep you and your family safe, here are four simple steps to take control of food safety in your kitchen.

- 1. Wash hands often.** This can eliminate nearly half of all cases of foodborne illness.
- 2. Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separate.**
- 3. Cook foods to proper temperatures.** Harmful bacteria are destroyed when food is cooked to proper temperatures.
- 4. Refrigerate promptly below 40 degrees F.**



Medicine News

by Hilary Tarazi

Ninety new physicians arrive at VASDHS and UCSD at the end of June to begin their three-year residency in internal medicine. Please welcome them! You will also see new faces in all the medical specialties, each one of which runs an advanced program for physicians who have completed their internal medicine residency. This year we begin an exciting new program in geriatric medicine; two fourth-year residents will get intensive training in the special needs of geriatric patients, an important segment of the veteran population and the U.S. in general.



Expansion of Services in North County



by Bob Stevens

The VA San Diego Healthcare System continues to expand services to current and new veterans in North County.

The North County Clinic, located in Vista, is expanding into a much larger facility and will offer additional services. While the clinic will remain in the same shopping center, a former NAVCARE Clinic located across the parking lot from the present clinic is being refurbished to increase the space from 1,500 to almost 10,000 square feet. The new facility will accommodate a projected workload of over 15,000 visits in FY 2002.

New patients will be able to enroll at the clinic and receive a screening physical for assignment to primary care. Veterans will now be able to receive Optometry services in the new state-of-the-art eye clinic, and Audiology services will be enhanced with a new sound booth and other equipment. A new lab will allow most tests to be processed at the clinic and Pharmacy services will be added soon. Space is available for adding Radiology services in the future.

We will maintain our close working relationship with the North County Vet Center. The Vet Center has provided the space and other support for the current clinic.

Further expansion of services in the North County is anticipated with the opening of a new clinic in Escondido. This facility is expected to open by October 1, 2000 and will be operated by a contractor. The new clinic will serve veterans in the Escondido, Ramona and North Poway area.

Pharmacy Safety Standards

by Kim Quicci-Roberts

VASDHS is continually involved in performance improvement projects and constantly striving to improve and enhance the safety of the care we provide to our patients. Our facility is working closely with the Institute for Safe Medication Practices and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to develop programs to enhance patient safety. In October of 1999, we agreed to participate in a national collaborative effort coordinated by the Veterans Health Administration and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, to reduce adverse drug events by 25% in all institutions and reduce specific medication errors, by 85%.

The VASDHS Collaborative Team determined that improving the current process for recording and verifying patients' medication allergies could result in a significant reduction in adverse drug events (ADE) and identified two specific goals:

1. Eliminate adverse drug events associated with medication being administered to patients with known medication allergies.
2. Assure 100% of the patients enrolled have either a negative (no known drug allergy) or positive entry in the computerized medication record allergy section.

To date, there have been **no** adverse drug events reported as a result of a medication being administered to a patient with a known medication allergy and **74%** of patients seen had allergy information documented in the computerized medical record.

The efforts of this team and the exemplary cooperation of the Medical Center's clinical staff have achieved these successes! With continued support, we believe that the VASDHS can achieve 100% allergy documentation within the next several months. Stay tuned for this and more innovative patient safety programs!

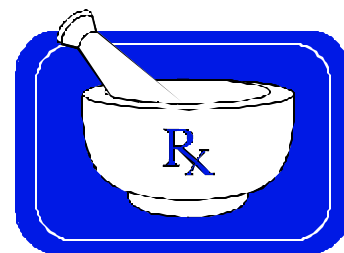
HIV Research

New drugs show promise against resistant HIV. VASDHS researcher, Karl Hostetler, M.D., and colleagues recently report-



Karl Hostetler, M.D.

ed that two new drugs they developed can inhibit HIV strains highly resistant to drugs commonly used to fight the AIDS virus. The laboratory-test findings offer potentially good news amid emerging viral resistance to "cocktail" therapies and the growing need for new treatment options.



2000 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

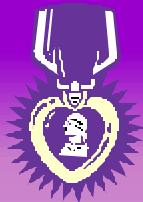
by Bob Gregory

Ten San Diego veterans traveled to Crested Butte, Colorado to participate in the 14th Annual Winter Sports Clinic (March 26-31). This year's clinic was a tremendous success, thanks to the efforts of the staff from the Grand Junction VA Medical Center, the DAV and numerous sponsors. Our veterans participated in adapted alpine, nordic and cross-country skiing. Alternative events included rock climbing, scuba diving, dog sledding, trout fishing and basketball. There were also self-defense classes, snowshoes and snowmobiles available. Everyone had a wonderful time and they are looking forward to many years of continued participation in the Winter Sports Clinic.



Michael Thomas receiving his medal

Attention: Purple Heart Recipients



Veterans health care eligibility status changed effective 11/30/99*

You are now:

- exempt from taking the Means Test effective 11/30/99
- exempt from making the Means Test copayment for care provided on or after 11/30/99
- still subject to pharmacy/medication copayments
- placed in Priority Group 3

For more information, or to enroll for health care, please

call Russ Ty at (858) 552-8585 ext. 3474.

* Veterans' Millennium Health Care & Benefits Act (PL 106-177)

Radiology Nurse Certification

by Joe Gagliardo

All three of our VASDHS radiology nurses are now certified by the American Radiological Nurses Association. Nancy Scott, RN, CRN, Cinda Sobotta, RN, CRN, and Bobbi



l.-r. Bobbi Campbell, Nancy Scott, Cinda Sobotta

Campbell, RN, CRN have all passed the certification exam and are currently the only San Diego nurses to have done so. The American Radiological Nurses began certification of Radiology Nurses in 1998. Certification is one part of the process called credentialing. It focuses specifically on the individual and is an indication of competence in a specialized area of practice.



"The great law of human nature is that people are instinctively impelled to return to you the same

feelings and attitudes that you give them. Give people sincere care and concern, and they'll usually be unconsciously influenced to return those same attitudes to you."

(The Customer, Ron Willingham)

Web Site Launch

by Bruce Nolan

Our new VASDHS web site is currently under development and is scheduled to launch this summer.



The Internet site will be available to anyone on the outside, as opposed to our Intranet that is only available for internal use. The site will have a public relations and marketing focus and will provide meaningful information about VASDHS services for patients, the media and other stakeholders. The Web Development Team includes Bruce Nolan (chair), Matt Rutter, Sandie Bee, Susie Sherman, Armand Bernheim, and Cindy Butler.

Awards & Recognition



1999 Hand & Hearts Award

John Gelles, DDS

Suggestion Awards

William Hartranft
Mark Abeyta
Brandon Caton
George Simpson

Karis Award

Mary Ekstrom
Janice Fincher
Mary Findley
Nancy Howerton
Pat Knirk
Nancy Withers, MD

Excellence in Service

Buenaventura Arriola
Terry Baker
Carlos Belanger
Robert Burmeister
Linda Florendo
Jonathan Flores
Irma Fraere
Danny Galan
Holly Hogan
Tu Le
Patrick Lumley
Larry McInnis
Merry Padilla

Excellence in Leadership

Donna Saffioti

Excellence in Teamwork

Nursing/Patient Care Services, Evening Medical Clerks

Ronald Cattanaach
Bonnie Greer
Jesus Laoang
Federico Marzo
Eduardo Ortiz
Percy Encarnacion
Adrian Hough
Lucito Manalo
Alfonso Miranda
Samuel Pamoleras

Nursing /Patient Care Services, FIRM Nurses

Suzanne Davis
Ann Ellis
Etta Jones
Betty Kimbrough
Tish Maddox
Glenda Williams
Mary Ortiz

Facilities Management Service

Robert Spreter
Roucal Reoh

Stress Management Trainers (multidisciplinary)

Judy Stubbs
Cheryl Janus
Elizabeth Pinner
Corrie Covert
Cathy Visconte
Mary Lacy
Ellen Berman
Lisa Lagorio
Adrianne Medina
Wilson Rowley
Wayne Doyle
Sandy Bell
Janiece Croteau
Margaret Chang, (ret)

Pat Gerko, (ret)

Social Workers for HBPC

Janis Fiske
Cheryl Zide

SCI Outpatient Admin Team

Marta Labelle
Susan MacWilliams

Info Pipeline

- Cindy Jones, RN, MSN, was awarded the 2000 Award for Excellence in Clinical Practice by the Gamma Gamma Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau.
- Laura Booth, RN, BSN, was awarded one of two graduate school scholarships from Gamma Gamma Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau..
- Cathy Magruder, RN, TB Program Coordinator, will serve on the Steering Committee of the San Diego Regional TB Task Force.
- Carla Melgun, RN, ICU, was nominated for NurseWeek Nursing Excellence Awards 2000.

Upcoming Events

June

- National Safety Month
- Performance Improvement Fair (6/14&15)
- Juneteenth Celebration (6/19)
- JCAHO Mock Survey for Hosp. (6/19-21)
- JCAHO Mock Survey for Amb. Care (6/22&23)
- Housestaff Orientation (6/23 & 30)
- 3rd Annual Safety Fair (6/26)

July

- Independence Day (7/4)

Service Pin Awards

35 Years

Sandra Bell

30 Years

Joan M Jurschak
Robert M Scott
Ronald M Harvey
Michael R Holbrook

25 Years

Dane Gilkey
Roberto V Galvez
Holly M Hogan
Robert C Pendleton
Leslie E Satz
Gary E Sharp

Ellen J Toth
Mark J Wiltzius
Danny P Briggs
Monico C Sangil
Ronald P Spagnola
Thomas P Olson
Rodrigo N Enriquez

Chancellor's Award

Pamela Stevens, RN, BSN, CNOR, Clinical Services Director and Dawn Berthiaume, RN, BSN, CNOR were a-warded the



Pam Stevens & Dawn Berthiaume

Chan-cellor's Award 2000 by the Economic Development Network for California Community Colleges in San Francisco on April 4. This is the highest honor given for outstanding partnership projects. Stevens and Berthiaume were involved in the San Diego Consortium for Perioperative Nurses Training, a collaborative educational program developed to train registered nurses to work in the operating room. Twelve nurses from VASDHS and Kaiser Permanente completed the program last fall. The selection process for this year is currently under way.

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Your suggestions, contributions and photos are most welcome. For submissions please send to 001PR.

Submissions for the next issues are due June 29th (for August/September) and August 3rd (for October/November).